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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASUNCION 001019

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/BSC AND INL ABBY SMITH
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD DAN JOHNSON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [PA](#)

SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: ANTI-DRUG CAMPAIGN STIRS THE WATERS

REF: ASUNCION 913

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Keane, For reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: With assistance from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the DOD Military Information Support Team (MIST), Paraguay's National Anti-Drug Secretariat (SENAD) recently began using Wanted Posters and media spots in the newspapers and on radio to obtain leads on their Most Wanted Persons. These advertisements have produced many calls and positive leads but have faced stiff resistance reprisals in Pedro Juan Caballero where drug traffickers exercise significant political influence. On August 9, the Ambassador met with Carlos Bernal, Colombian Ambassador to Paraguay, to discuss this program and to rebut Bernal's objections to mention of a Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) presence in Paraguay. End Summary.

2. (C) The MIST program assists the interagency information campaign to further the policies and objectives of the U.S. and Paraguay. The MIST has three (3) core objectives: a) decrease the operational effectiveness of criminal and terrorist elements operating in country; b) increase the professionalism of Paraguayan Security Forces; and c) increase public trust in the GOP and its agencies. Recently, the Director of Paraguay's Anti-Drug Secretariat Hugo Ibarra told the DCM the ad campaign had produced many calls and positive leads on their Most Wanted Persons. He said the campaign has narcos hunkering down, possibly making them easier to capture. (reftel).

3. (C) In the face of mounting pressure, the drug traffickers seek to obstruct the program, including through intimidation. Between 3 Aug and 5 Aug, the locally-contracted billboard vendor in Pedro Juan Caballero, a city on Paraguay's northern border with Brazil that serves as epicenter for much of Paraguay's drug-related activity, reported three incidents that resulted in the suspension of all postings in the region until further notice. In each case, the contract employees or the land owners supporting implementation of the program received death threats. In one incident, a land owner who had agreed to have a billboard posted on his property was repeatedly harassed and ultimately died of a heart attack after being confronted in person. In another case, local government and law enforcement officials told a land owner that there would be retribution if the billboard was put up. The land owner allowed the vendor to post the billboards; the next morning, however, the images of the Wanted Persons were painted over with black paint.

4. (C) Recently, Ambassador Bernal of Colombia wrote to SENAD Chief Hugo Ibarra expressing his concern about the "stigma" the ad spots attached to Colombia with claims of a FARC presence in Paraguay. In his meeting with the Ambassador on August 9, Bernal expressed concerns that the ads will contribute to a) distrust of Colombians in Paraguay, one of the few countries in the world where Colombians remain highly appreciated, b) the possible harassment of Colombians, or c) introduction of a visa requirement for Colombian travelers.

5. (C) In his response to Bernal, Ibarra identified the objectives of the MIST program and the importance of this operation to the security of Paraguay and the region. He noted that many of the wanted traffickers in Paraguay are tied to the FARC as are those implicated in the Cecilia Cubas kidnapping.

6. (C) During his August 9 meeting with Bernal, the Ambassador similarly identified some of the campaign priorities which include a) gaining information against drug traffickers, including specifically, many wanted Brazilian traffickers, b) sensitizing the public about drug traffickers in their midst and gaining public cooperation for the anti-narcotics efforts, and c) noting the FARC links to drug trafficking and other crimes in Paraguay. Colombia itself had shared intelligence that spoke to FARC ties to traffickers in Paraguay as well as the Cubas kidnapping. Cultural activities that highlight Colombia's rich cultural heritage were the best way to counter negative perceptions about Colombia.

7. (C) COMMENT: Bernal took the Ambassador's point on board

and made clear he was not asking for the ads to be removed. The Ambassador believes that Colombia will not go any further in raising objections to the FARC radio ads. The reaction of traffickers and attempts to intimidate those who cooperate with it show they are having an effect. Seeking to build on increased seizures and the extradition of Mendes Mezquita, post will urge senior GOP authorities to publicly support anti-narcotics efforts, denounce attempts at intimidation in Pedro Juan Caballero, and declare that the efforts against these criminals will continue and intensify.

KEANE